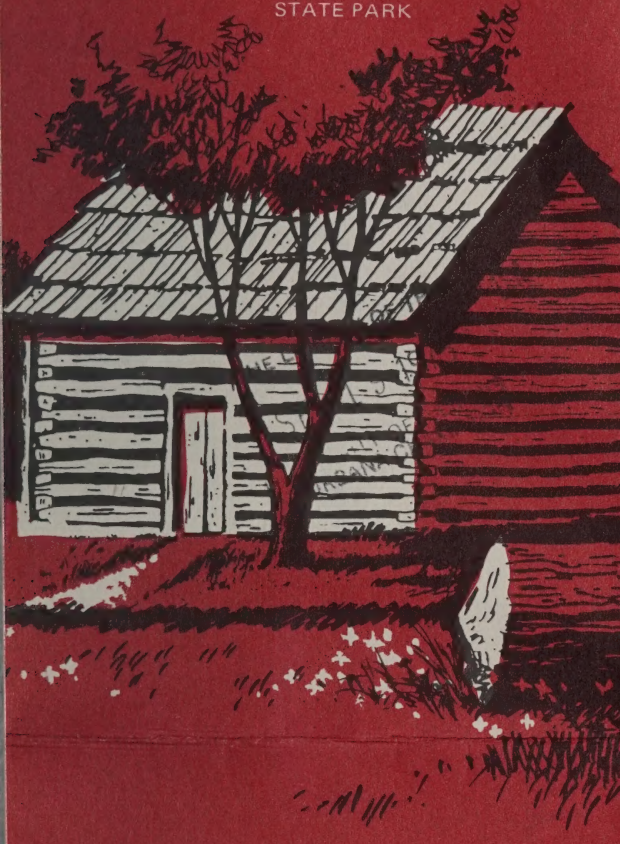
lincoln trail homestead

STATE PARK



Illinois Department of Conservation

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THE PARK

Lincoln Trail Homestead State Park is the site of the first Illinois home of Abraham Lincoln's parents, Thomas and Sarah Bush Lincoln. The 162-acre park lies along the banks of the Sangamon River about 8 miles southwest of Decatur in Macon County.

LINCOLN COMES TO ILLINOIS

The Lincoln family encountered many hardships before their move to Illinois. Thomas Lincoln, working as a carpenter and farmer, had indifferent success in earning a living in Kentucky because of land title difficulties. In 1816 he moved to Indiana where his wife, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, died in 1818 during an epidemic of the "milk sickness." Thomas married Sarah Bush Johnston in 1819 and brought her and her three children from Elizabethtown, Kentucky, to the Indiana farm.

Lured by reports of more fertile soil and frightened by another scare of milk sickness, Thomas Lincoln decided to migrate to Macon County in Illinois.

In early March 1830 he set out with a caravan of three wagons and 13 persons for the slow and tiresome 250-mile trip. The exact route they followed can only be surmised, with the exception of the 10 miles between Vincennes, Indiana, and their entrance into Illinois north of Lawrenceville.

Arriving in Macon County, the group spent the first night in what is now Lincoln Square in Decatur. The following day, the wagons moved on to the home of John Hanks, a cousin of Nancy Hanks Lincoln. Hanks suggested that Lincoln settle on a piece of Government property along the Sangamon River approximately eight miles southwest of Decatur, now the Lincoln Trail Homestead State Park.

Abraham Lincoln, then a strong youth more than 6 feet tall, helped put up the cabin, smoke house and barn. The 16 by 16-foot cabin was of hewed logs, and the doors and floors were puncheon. The few nails which were used had been brought from Indiana. A common ax, a broad ax, a handsaw and a "drawer knife" were the tools the Lincolns possessed. As soon as the house was up, Abraham split rails to fence in about ten acres of ground, which he then planted in corn.

Discouraged with Illinois after a miserable winter marooned by six feet of snow, Thomas Lincoln started back to Indiana in the spring of 1831. En route, he and Sarah stopped in Coles county, were persuaded to settle down, and spent their last years at the present site of the Lincoln Log Cabin State Park. In 1831 Abraham embarked on a career of his own and spent the next 6 years at the village that is now preserved as Lincoln's New Salem State Park.

The Lincoln cabin stood for many years and for a time was used as a school house. Little thought was given to it, until after the assassination of President Lincoln. Then, in 1865, it was taken

apart and shipped to Chicago for exhibition at the Northwestern Sanitary Fair, and later was exhibited on Boston Common. After that it was sold to an English syndicate to be shipped to England and is thought to have been lost in transit.

Cabin Reconstruction: The State of Illinois purchased 62 acres for the area in 1938. The acreage now totals 162, including the parkway leading to the site. Formal dedication ceremonies were held in November 1957, at which time an historic marker set in a large boulder was unveiled. The Decatur Kiwanis Club pledged up to $15,000 for materials and labor for the reconstruction of the cabin. Legislation was enacted approving the project in September, 1971. Research and architectural plans for the reconstruction project were then completed and construction began in February, 1975.

FACILITIES

Picnicking: A large picnic area is near the shelter and playground. Several other shaded picnic areas are scattered throughout the park. Cooking may be done on camp or park stoves. Drinking water and toilets are available as well as parking lots.

Hiking: A long trail winds along the riverside with wildflowers and a variety of birds and small animals to observe. The trail leads to a bluff where an overlook affords a view of the Sangamon River and the fertile valley surrounding it.

Fishing: The Sangamon River offers an opportunity to catch largemouth and smallmouth bass, sunfish, crappie, channel catfish, bullhead, carp, yellow bass, sucker and drum. Although motors are allowed, small boats and canoes are more popular because of the nature of the river. A small launching ramp is available.

Group Camping: An area is reserved for youth group camping; groups of over 25 persons must have advance permission to enter the park. Family camping is prohibited.

Whitley Dam: At low flow of the Sangamon River, remnants of the dam serving the Whitley Mill can be seen from the bluff south of the cabin site.

The Memorial: The area around the monument marking the Lincoln Homestead has been revamped and many plantings were added to provide a more realistic wooded background similar to the Lincoln's year spent here.

Please: This area is for all to enjoy so help keep it clean. Put all litter in the nearest available trash container. No flowers, plants, shrubs or trees may be removed or damaged. If you need help or have a question, contact the site manager.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION . . .

Admittance will not be granted groups of 25 or more persons to any state park or conservation area unless permission from the park ranger has been secured to use the facilities. It is also required that groups of minors have adequate supervision and that at least one responsible adult accompany each group not exceeding 15 minors. All pets must be on a leash.

Numerous state parks and memorials are within easy access of every part of the state. Lodges, cabins and dining rooms are important features of Illinois Beach, Starved Rock, Pere Marquette, White Pines Forest and Giant City. Reservations for lodging should be made with lodge managers.

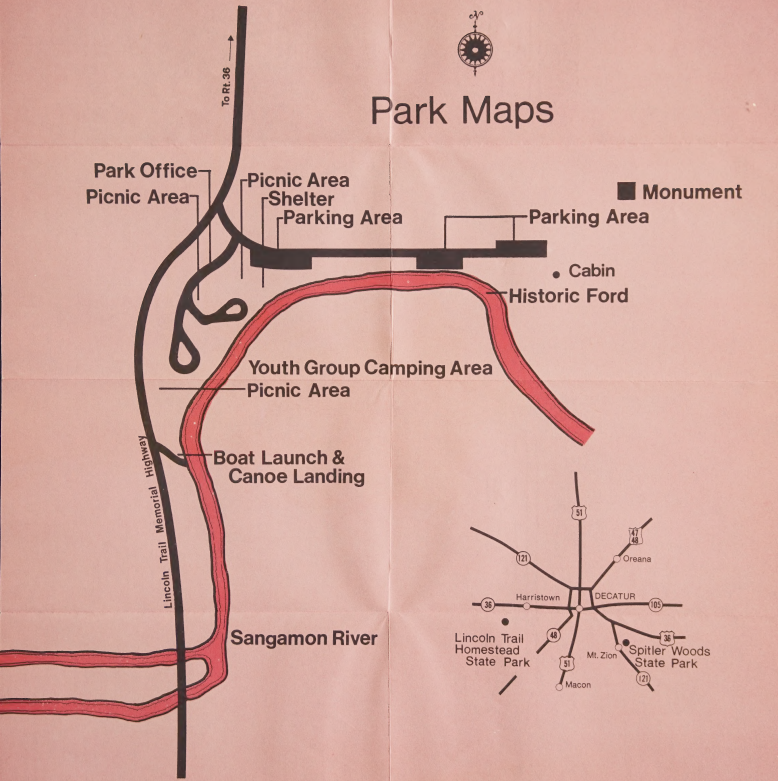
All state parks are open the year round. When weather conditions necessitate the closing of park roads during freezing and thawing periods, access to park facilities is by foot only.

For more details contact Ranger, % Spitler Woods State Park, Box 705, Spitler Park Drive, Mt. Zion, Illinois, 62549; phone 217/864-3121. For information on other Illinois sites, write the Department of Conservation, Information/Education Division, State Office Building, Springfield, Illinois 62706.

1865 illustration of Lincoln family home.

Illinois State Historical Library

Park Maps


To Rt. 36
Park Office
Picnic Area
Picnic Area
Shelter
Parking Area
Parking Area
Monument
Cabin
Historic Ford
Youth Group Camping Area
Picnic Area
Boat Launch &
Canoe Landing
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